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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 002440

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/7/2017
TAGS: PREL FR IR IZ PGOV
SUBJECT: FRENCH MFA OFFICIAL SHARES VIEWS ON IRAN/IRAQ

CLASSIFIED BY: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: FRANCK GELLET, FRENCH DAS-EQUIVALENT FOR THE
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PERSIAN GULF, SHARED HIS VIEWS ON IRAN AND IRAQ ON JUNE 7.
GELLET ASSESSED THAT THE IRANIANS ARE OVERCONFIDENT AND
VULNERABLE TO A BAN ON INTERNATIONAL AIR TRAVEL. HIS
ASSESSMENT OF IRAQ WAS NOTABLY BLEAK. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) OVER LUNCH JUNE 7, THE MFAS DAS-EQUIVALENT FOR THE
PERSIAN GULF, FRANCK GELLET, SHARED HIS VIEWS ON IRAN AND
IRAQ. HAVING RECENTLY RETURNED FROM A 15-DAY TRIP TO IRAN,
GELLET SAID THAT HIS MOST SERIOUS AND USEFUL INTERLOCUTOR WAS
FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER VELAYATI, WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS BEING
"LESS ROMANTIC" THAN THE REGIME'S OTHER FOREIGN POLICY
HEAVYWEIGHTS. GELLET SAID THAT VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE IRANIAN
OFFICIALS HE MET OVERESTIMATED THE REGIME'S STRENGTH, BOTH ON
THE REGIONAL AND THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE. "THE IRANIANS ARE
CONVINCED THAT NO ONE -- INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES -- CAN
TOUCH THEM ECONOMICALLY OR MILITARILY. THEY SIMPLY CAN'T
IMAGINE THAT THE U.S. HAS THE CAPACITY AND THE POLITICAL WILL
TO LAUNCH A MILITARY STRIKE AGAINST THEM AT A TIME WHEN THE
U.S. MILITARY APPEARS TO BE BOGGED DOWN IN IRAQ," SAID
GELLET.

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¶3. (C) GELLET SAID HIS OWN VIEW (WHICH, HE CAUTIONED, IS NOT
SHARED BY EVERYONE AT THE MFA), IS THAT IF THE EUROPEANS
REALLY WANT TO AVOID A MILITARY CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE
U.S. AND IRAN THEN THEY NEED TO SHOW THE IRANIANS THEY ARE
SERIOUS ABOUT ECONOMIC SANCTIONS. "THE IRANIANS WILL NEVER
BLINK UNTIL THEY FEEL THAT THE REGIME'S SURVIVAL IS AT
STAKE," SAID GELLET. HE SUGGESTED THAT -- IN ADDITION TO A
FURTHER SANCTIONS ON THE BANKING SECTOR, A FULL ARMS EMBARGO,
AND A CUT IN EXPORT CREDITS -- THE IRANIANS MIGHT BE
VULNERABLE TO AN EMBARGO OF REFINED PETROLEUM PRODUCTS. IN
ADDITION, HE SUGGESTED THAT WE NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE DRAMATIC
ISOLATING EFFECT THAT A BAN ON INTERNATIONAL AIR TRAVEL TO
AND FROM IRAN WOULD HAVE. GELLET NOTED THAT THESE WERE JUST
HIS PERSONAL VIEWS, AND SAID THAT HE HAS NOT YET RECEIVED ANY
GUIDANCE FROM THE NEW PRESIDENCY ON IRAN SANCTIONS. HE
OBSERVED THAT PRESIDENT SARKOZY TOOK A HARD LINE AGAINST THE
IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM DURING HIS ELECTION CAMPAIGN, BUT
SAID IT REMAINED TO BE SEEN WHAT THAT WOULD TRANSLATE INTO IN
POLICY TERMS.

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¶4. (C) GELLET, WHO SERVED FOR NEARLY THREE YEARS AT THE FRENCH EMBASSY IN BAGHDAD BEFORE ASSUMING HIS CURRENT POSITION, HAD A PARTICULARLY GRIM VIEW OF IRAQ. "WE DON'T HAVE THE SLIGHTEST HOPE IT CAN BE SALVAGED -- IT'S LOST," HE SAID. HE PREDICTED THAT IRAQ WILL DESCEND INTO FULL-SCALE CIVIL WAR WHETHER OR NOT MNF-I REMAINS. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE PREDICTED THAT IF THE COALITION WERE TO WITHDRAW THERE WOULD BE AN IMMEDIATE AND HORRIFIC SPIKE IN THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE. "YOUR DEPARTURE WOULD BE SEEN EVERYWHERE AS A SIGN THAT IT'S TIME FOR THE GLOVES TO COME OFF," HE SAID. HE FURTHER PREDICTED THAT, IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE COALITION'S DEPARTURE (WHENEVER THAT OCCURS), THE ENSUING CONFLICT WOULD LAST MANY YEARS UNTIL IRAQ'S SUNNIS AND SHIITES (AND THEIR RESPECTIVE PATRONS) WERE EXHAUSTED. AS FOR THE KURDS, GELLET SAID THEY SERIOUSLY UNDERESTIMATED THE RISK THAT THEY WOULD BE ANNIHILATED DURING THE COURSE OF A CIVIL WAR THAT WOULD LIKELY PULL IN MOST OF IRAQ'S NEIGHBORS, INCLUDING TURKEY.

¶5. (C) NOTWITHSTANDING HIS BLEAK ANALYSIS, GELLET ENCOURAGED

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THE U.S. TO CONTINUE ITS EFFORTS TO PROMOTE RECONCILIATION. HE NOTED THAT ONE COMPLAINT HE OFTEN HEARD FROM HIS SUNNI CONTACTS WAS THAT THEY RECEIVED CONFLICTING MESSAGES FROM THE VARIOUS USG AGENCIES ON THE GROUND IN IRAQ, AND WERE NEVER SURE WHICH OF THEM HAD THE ULTIMATE DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY. GELLET FINISHED BY WARNING THAT OUR TRIBAL ALLIES IN ANBAR PROVINCE WOULD TURN ON US WHENEVER IT SUITED THEIR INTERESTS TO DO SO.

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